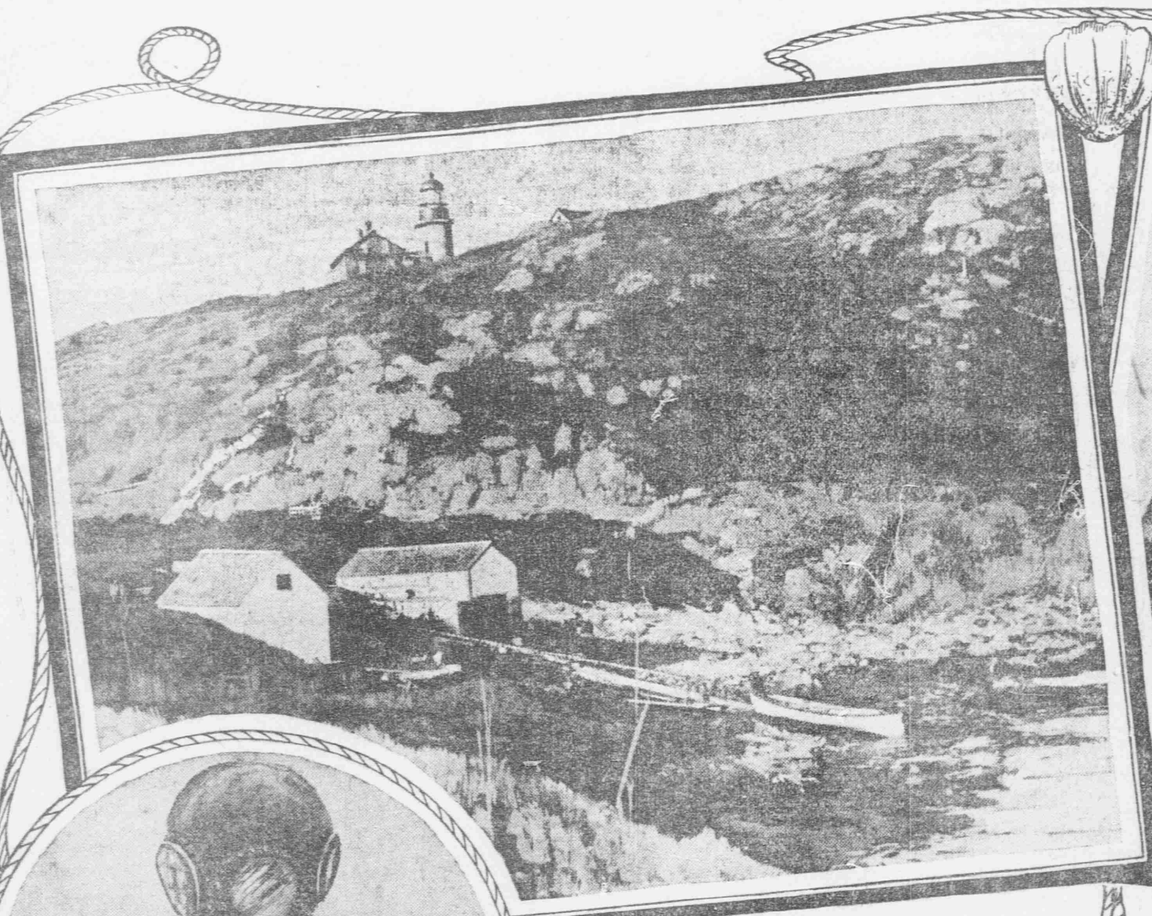
SEARCH FOR SEA TREASURE ON MAINE'S RUGGED COAST.

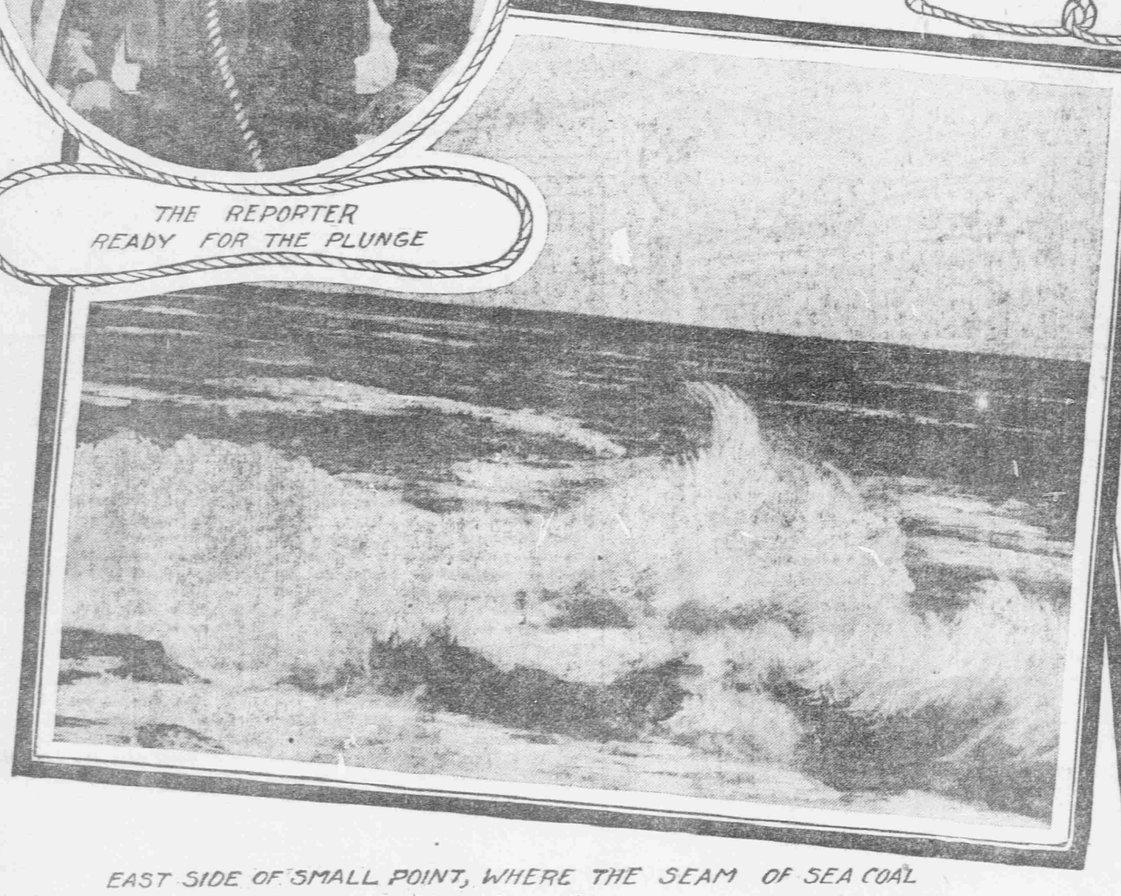


SEGUIN ISLAND, NEAR WHICH THE REPORTER MADE HIS DESCENT

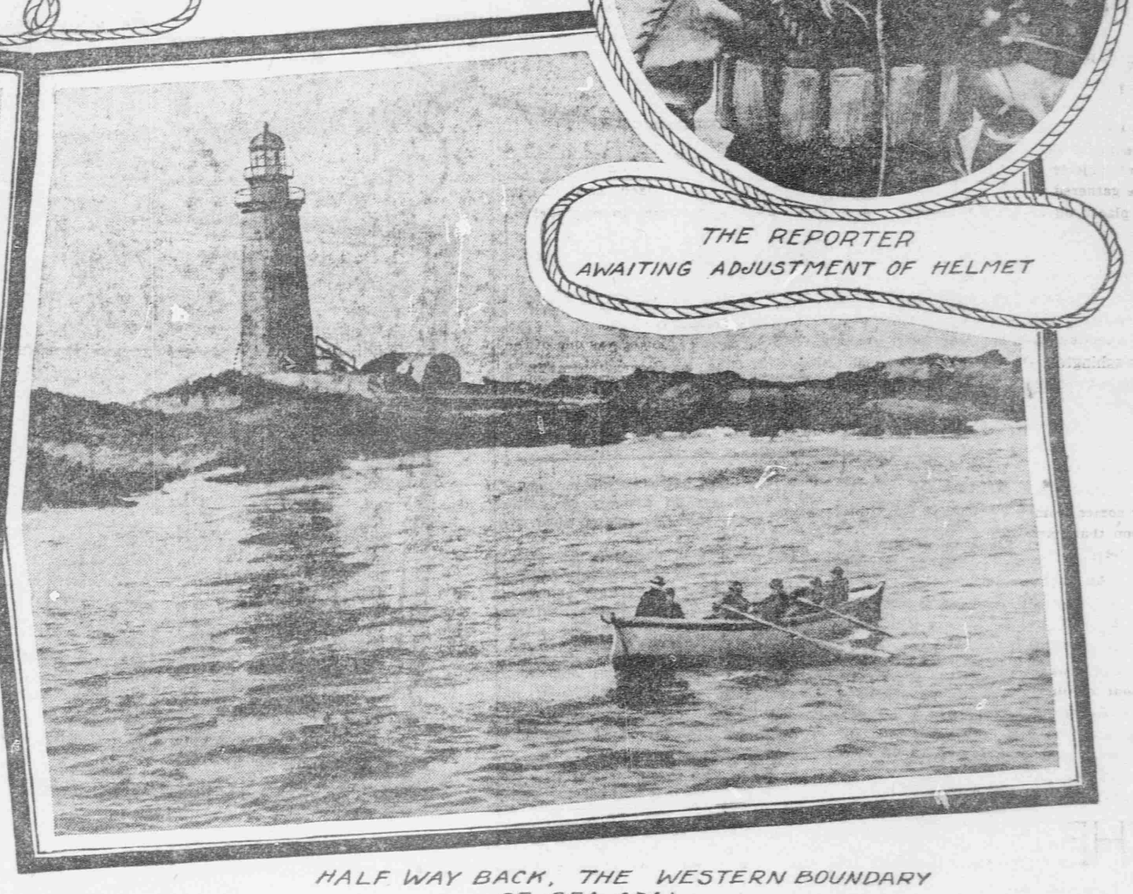
POND ISLAND—NEAR THIS ISLAND QUANTITIES OF SEA COAL ARE FOUND

THE REPORTER READY FOR THE PLUNGE

THE REPORTER AWAITING ADJUSTMENT OF HELMET



EAST SIDE OF SMALL POINT, WHERE THE SEAM OF SEA COAL IS SUPPOSED TO BE



HALF WAY BACK, THE WESTERN BOUNDARY OF SEA COAL

No tale of sunken treasure and pirate crew ever held more of the essence of romance than is found in the true story of the search for a sea treasure on the coast of Maine—a treasure of coal.

An effort was made some time ago to locate a seam of valuable coal that is supposed to crop up on the bottom of the sea near Small Point, a promontory separating the Kennebec River from Casco Bay.

Successive companies with ample capital have tried in vain to find the vein. Great hunks of coal wash ashore at Popham Beach after every storm. Such specimens often show bright fractures, proving that they were recently broken from the mother seam by the action of the waves. In considerable quantities this coal is cast up on a beach four miles long. Its origin is the one baffling mystery of the Maine coast.

Value of This Sea Coal.

Coal has been abnormally high-priced of late, but the highest quotations during the past weeks of famine were not one-third as high as would gladly be paid for Small Point sea coal. There is none in the world more valuable. In quality it closely approaches the famous cannel coal. Its general appearance is similar to that of other coal, except that its texture is finer. It burns readily, with a steady, yellow flame. The heat generated is said to be greater than that of any other fuel known. So "fatty" is it in substance that it burns almost as readily as a tallow candle.

Nothing like Small Point coal is known anywhere else on the American continent. Even under normal conditions of the coal trade, $20 per ton would be a low price for this extraordinary fuel. Coal of a similar grade, found in sections of Great Britain, is used in arts requiring an intense and constantly sustained heat. The little of such coal now used in this country is imported from Europe, and it is the high price of the imported product which has been responsible for the recent remarkable operations carried on at Small Point and vicinity.

As Valuable as a Gold Mine.

A vast fortune unquestionably awaits the man who shall locate the vein, provided the canal is found in such position as to enable working. No gold or silver mine could yield surer wealth than this mystifying vein of coal hidden by the waters of the Atlantic.

The market is clamoring for a product which is not forthcoming. No wonder that for over a century the location of this seam of coal has been the dream of speculator and fisherman alike. No wonder the search has led to a series of operations unique in the history of coal prospecting and mining.

The end of the hunt is not yet. It is still going on and will, until perchance that day when the sea shall give up its secrets and all things shall be revealed as in an open book.

The Search of a Century.

This story of striving for the sunken treasure of Small Point began over 100 years ago. The chronicles of that section of the Maine coast do not go back to a time when the inhabitants were not looking for it. The efforts to discover the priceless vein were at first sporadic and individual. Even in pre-Revolutionary days coal was invaluable for forging purposes, particularly when the coal was of such superior grade as that washed ashore by the breakers at Popham Beach and Small Point.

Grief of a Patriarch.

Later, companies were formed and organized efforts were made to locate the vein. Since early in the last century Boston men have been deeply interested in the project, and have lavishly poured their money into the coffers of various companies that have been organized to discover the vein.

One beautiful September morning about seventy years ago an old gentleman, bent and shaken with the weight of his ninety years, stood upon the shore at Small Point in the town of Phippsburg, and wept bitterly. The sunlight was dancing merrily over the water and the gentle swash of the ways on the rocks arose in responsive sobs.

Near by stood a barefoot lad, gazing in astonishment at the grief of the old man, who kept murmuring to himself in childish, sob-shaken tones, "I can't remember, I can't remember." He sat him down on the wood-strewn rocks and buried his face in his hands, until at length the lad, with great pity in his heart for the poor old gentleman, led his aged companion away.

The Patriots Knew the Vein.

The old gentleman was Capt. William Sprague, at that time a resident of the town of Bowdoinham, but formerly of Phippsburg, where he had passed the better part of his life. The lad was Percy Small, now a man eighty years of age and still living within sight of the scene described.

Captain Sprague had in his younger days followed the sea, but while still a young man he had learned the blacksmithing trade. During the Revolutionary war he made guns for the patriots and had used coal in his forge that he had himself taken from a sunken ledge lying off the shore at Small Point.

While on a visit to his former home he had expressed a wish to once more visit the reef where, as a young man, he had pried up the seams of coal, but when it came to locating the spot his memory failed him. He was in his dotage and could not remember, and as he wept in the bitterness of his heart the waves purled and sobbed in mockery to his distress.

The Same Old Quest.

In the interval of years since the aged mariner wept upon the sands others engaged in the same quest have felt like following his example.

He was but one of several who once knew where the seam cropped out at low water mark. Almost within the memory of persons now living the exact location of the vein was known.

According to traditions, this coal was known to the early settlers of this section of the coast. They called it "sea coal," and were wont to pick it up on the beach after a heavy storm. According to these stories, the coal was used for both fuel and forging purposes, and was found in sufficient abundance to make the gathering of it a matter of serious effort on the part of those who preferred to use it.

That the case of Capt. William Sprague is by no means an isolated one is proven by that of Mrs. Mary J. Wallace, of Small Point, who died recently aged eighty-two years. She often said that she could remember her father, when she was a little girl seven or eight years old, getting coal at the beach at Small Point and bringing it home.

Covered With Barnacles.

She has said that very often this coal, which was most often secured after a storm, would frequently be covered with barnacles and other marine growth, and that while worn smooth on most sides by the action of the waves, the lumps would usually show evidence at some place of having been recently broken off from a reef.

Mrs. Wallace's father lived to be ninety-four years of age, and he had frequently told her that he could not remember a time when this coal was not to be procured in the manner related.

This testimony alone would seem to establish the fact that coal has been known to exist at Small Point for at least 150 years. But it is not necessary to rely upon a few such isolated cases. Tradition is rich in reference to this matter, and, thanks to the longevity in that section, the dates in most cases can be made to have some bearing upon the present.

A Real Reef of Coal.

There is now living on Dummer Street, in Bath, James Norton, who is able to throw a little more light upon the mass of evidence in support of the coal reef theory.

For many years Mr. Norton followed the business of lightering, and while in the pursuit of this profession he was one time called to Small Point to recover a cargo of hides that were in the hold of a vessel sunk in a storm off Sea Wall Beach. The method of securing the hides was by probing with hooks set in long poles.

Great Quantities of Anthracite.

The vessel had by this time gone to pieces and the hides lay on the bed of the sea. It was noticed by the workmen that the hooks were frequently covered with particles of coal after being driven hard against the bottom. Before an investigation of the bottom could be made a violent storm arose and further work had to be abandoned.

During the past hundred years or more vast quantities of this coal have been thrown up on the beach extending from Small Point to Hunnewell's Point. After a heavy storm today it is thrown up just as it was in the days of Capt. William Sprague.

The writer has himself picked up quantities of it, some of the specimens being large, much larger than is ever seen in imported anthracite coal.

Nearly a Ton Thrown Up.

During the December storm that wrecked the schooner Gondola on Seguin ledges there was probably not less than 1,800 pounds cast up on the beach. And it was noticed that these pieces of coal bore evidences of erosion by the sea waves. The fractures of these specimens were bright and clear-cut, showing that they had recently been broken from a vein not far from the shore. It is impossible to walk along the south beach at Popham without seeing more or less of this coal.

The coal is there. It has been coming for many years. Where does it come from?

Geologists have arisen and said that coal will never be found at Small Point. They point out that the rock is of too old a formation; that coal is never found covered by such rock.

Prof. Leslie Lee of Bowdoin College, has examined the geological conditions that obtain at Small Point and has expressed it as his opinion that coal is not likely to be found. Prof. Lee recently went over the ground in person and saw nothing to change the opinion he had formed years ago as the result of having examined specimens of the rock that had been submitted to him.

The outcropping rock at Isaiah's Head, the scene of early attempts to discover the vein, is composed of hard crystalline schist, sometimes called mica slate. The layers, which are of varying thickness, show signs of having been subjected to great pressure, the general dip being in a southwesterly direction. Coal is always found in company with shale sandstone or limestone, and these are not present in this formation.

Boston Men Tried to Find It.

In 1837 Maine's first State geologist, Dr. Charles T. Jackson, made a careful examination of this entire territory. In his report he refers to efforts that were about to be made by Boston parties to discover this historic vein of coal.

He thus characterizes the attempt: "Their attempts to find coal in a place where nature never places it will of course prove abortive, and they will learn, after idly expending their capi-

(Continued on Fifth Page.)